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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE HOOK UP HANGOVER:
THE DECLINE IN TRADITIONAL DATING BEYOND THE COLLEGE CAMPUS –
BEFORE FORMAL COMMITMENT

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY

REGINALD NIEVERA

CHICAGO, IL

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In our search for freedom, honesty, love, and equality, many [critics] claim, we have found only meaningless sex, loneliness, and lack of commitment. We have epidemics of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Some critics even say we have left youth without the rules that are essential to stability, much less for romance.

—Beth Bailey, *From the Front Porch to the Backseat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America*

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ABSTRACT

The early 21st century is seeing unprecedented changes to the dating lives of American adults. Fewer than ever before are getting married and those that do want to marry, are waiting longer than ever before. This is breeding a new stage of development in our personal lives. It is a stage characterized by a prolonged gap between finishing school, becoming an “adult” and getting married or starting a family. It may be distinguished by years of being single and independent; simultaneously coming to terms with the responsibilities of adulthood, meeting romantic partners, casual dating, or courting potential lifelong companions. This is a time when American adults will enter, break off, and reenter multiple relationships with a variety of partners; a time when we may give up on romantic love, reject monogamy, or lose faith in marriage as a viable institution.

Scholars have argued that adults revert back to traditional forms of dating after leaving the “hook up culture” on the college campus, but this research study has revealed that dating after college is not traditional at all. Using a qualitative-inductive based approach, I interviewed 22 college-educated, working adults living in and around a major metropolitan U.S. city in the Midwest. The data has revealed that these graduated adults have abandoned many aspects of traditional dating scripts and hold on to remnants of college hook up culture, thus constructing a pseudo hook up culture after college. I refer to this social phenomenon as the “hook up hangover.” The extensively examined college hook up culture does not disappear after graduation; in fact, it has left a significant lasting impression upon its participants as they continue on to their adult lives beyond the university campus.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SPACE BETWEEN

In the 21st century, there has been a major shift in the arena of dating, courtship, and marriage (Bogle 2008; Cherlin 2009; Stanley, Rhoades, & Fincham 2010). Americans are waiting longer to marry than ever before and some do not plan on marrying at all. This sort of behavior is especially odd for a society that has historically been deeply invested in the institution of marriage (Cherlin 2009). The married population in the U.S. is at the lowest percentage than it has ever been before and some will argue that they may soon become the minority (Cohn, Passel, Wang & Livingston 2011). It is rare in the U.S. for the population of single individuals to come close to outnumbering the population of married individuals.

The Pew Research Center of Social and Demographic Trends reported that only about 51 percent of adults ages 18 and older, are currently married as opposed to 72 percent in 1960. Just 20 percent of young adults ages 18-29 are married today compared to 59 percent in 1960. These statistics reveal drastic changes in the dating and courtship behavior of Americans. Just over twenty years ago the average age of first marriage was 23 years old for women and 26 years old for men (Stanley et al. 2010). Recent studies show that the average age of first marriage was extended to over 26 years old for women and nearly 29 years old for men (Cohn et al. 2011). Consequently, the resulting lifestyle trend among 21st century contemporary American adults is to remain single for longer or opt out of the age-old tradition of marriage all together (Cohen et al. 2011).

Millions of individuals in the U.S. today are delaying or straying away from lifelong, formal commitment and what is left is an arbitrary social environment of constant uncertainty governed by contradicting expressions of individual self-fulfillment and companionate love (Cherlin 2008). Dating and relationship scholars like Willard Waller, Margaret Mead, and Beth Bailey examined an entirely different American culture than today, where monogamous, formal commitment was the unquestioned status quo. American dating and courtship convention has shifted to a new frontier emerging somewhere between completing school and formal marital engagement. It is the space between, the gap between elementary dating and lifelong commitment that is of course if successful marriage endures.

Research Question

The statistics released by the Pew Research Center of Social and Demographic Trends that I mentioned above, suggest that a new stage has developed in the life course, a stage characterized by a prolonged gap between finishing school, becoming an adult, and entering a formal commitment and/or starting a family. It is characterized by years of remaining single and independent searching for self-fulfillment, but simultaneously discovering how to come to terms with the responsibilities of adulthood and remaining socially, romantically, and sexually active. It is often a time of disorder, confusion, and conflict as well as soul-searching and identity formation. During this time, adults may meet, court, date, and then break up with many suitors (Cherlin 2008); it is a time where we may give up on romantic love, reject monogamy, or possibly lose faith in marriage as the institution that best facilitates self-fulfillment and a healthy family life. In this study, I focus on the adults that unwillingly or voluntarily inhabit this stage. I seek to discover how adults in the 21st century U.S. approach, navigate, and perform dating after college?

Literature Review

Taking Off Where “Hooking Up” Ended

Kathleen Bogle (2008) researched and published a study on the conventions of modern dating and sexual behavior among college students in her book, *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*. She closely examines what many researchers have deemed the “hook up” culture on the U.S. college campus. Bogle states, “College students rarely date in the traditional sense of the term,” (2008:1). Dating has essentially been replaced by a hook up culture. The traditional dating conventions Beth Bailey (1988) illustrated just 25 years ago using content analysis of decades of instructional relationship and dating publications seemed to be on the verge of becoming obsolete. Bogle’s findings reveal that students rarely go on the traditional one-on-one date to public arenas. In the hook up environment, college-aged “coeds” go out in groups to different social gatherings, at bars and house parties, meeting up with other groups of college-aged men and women with the possibility of hooking up. Some actively seek out hook up partners, while others maintain a more subtle attitude, passively waiting for a hook up opportunity to transpire. The terms describing what a “hook up” is are often vague. A hook up encounter does not necessarily mean sex nor is a precursor to a committed relationship. It has a wide variety of meanings ranging from passionate kissing to sexual intercourse and anything in between.

Bogle argues that there are primarily two factors that have led to this shift in dating behavior: the delayed age at first marriage and the greater numbers of students enrolled in college. Hooking up has eventually become the dominant script on the U.S college campus. Bogle engaged in over seventy discussions with a variety of students from both public and private institutions to investigate the concept of hooking up and its culture. Due to her efforts,

we now have a better understanding of how *students* form romantic and sexual experiences, but one question that remains unanswered is how *adults* form romantic and sexual experiences.

An argument can be made that college students are adults, but recent research has split adulthood into two, emerging adulthood and adulthood (Stanley et al. 2010). In this study, I move away from the student populations and focus on the latter half. Bogle briefly attempts to examine dating convention after college. She says, “Relatively few studies examine how college students establish themselves as a couple in the first place,” (2008:4) and I have found that it is just as rare to find studies that examine alumni as well. Bogle argues that once people leave the hook up environment on the college campus, they revert back to traditional forms of dating and courtship, somewhat resembling the behavior illustrated by Bailey (1988) some 25 years ago in the “Dating Era.” One of Bogle’s original research questions was, “why [dis] the ‘rules’ (or lack thereof) that governed the hookup system on campus seemed no longer to apply once graduated?” (2008:4). The idea of a reversion to traditional dating may be over simplified and a idealistic. Her argument suggests that removing an individual from the social environment of the college campus somehow transforms their dating and courtship behavior to being more traditional. Further, Bogle argues that, “Dating replaces hooking up as the primary script after college because the environmental factors that made hooking up easy on campus are no longer in place” (2008:132).

If we indeed revert back to traditional dating as Bogle contends, then hooking up and encounters of casual sex should no longer occur after graduation, or a least, should not appear outside of the college campus. Bogle states, “Results indicate that college students have become more liberal over time in terms of both their attitudes on sex and their sexual behavior,” (2008:4) but college students are the not the only population vulnerable to such ideological alteration. Through this study, I’ve examined whether or not those attitudes persist

into adulthood. Researchers have argued extensively that socially acceptable sexual encounters can occur within a wide a variety of relationships apart from marriage (Armstrong, Hamilton, & England 2010; Manning, Giordano, & Longmore 2006). The reversion to dating idea after graduation contradicts Bogle's findings on the hook up culture. In this study, I spotlight this "return to dating" idea exclusively and concentrate on the adults that are removed from their college environments.

Graduating from Elementary Dating

Romantic love is undoubtedly an important aspect of public and private life among Americans, so much so that we begin expressing serious emotional attachment, expressing romantic love as early as fourteen years old (Florsheim 2003), and by the age of seventeen many will already have engaged in sexual intercourse (Bianchi & Casper 2000). Most of the research published on dating scripts, courtship, and romantic relationships has focused primarily on younger populations. Adolescence and emerging adulthood consists of roughly eight years in a lifetime, ages 14-23 (Stanley et. al 2010), leaving adults ages 24 and over as a population that remains virtually uninvestigated.

Scientists have devoted an enormous amount of time and effort to studying the potentially harmful romantic and sexual lives of adolescents (Carver, Joyner & Shaffer 2003), teenagers (Stanley et al. 2010), and undergraduate students (Bogle 2008), but the romantic relationships of their own adult cohort has proven to be just as perilous as the younger populations that precede them (Cherlin 2009). Bailey states, "Marriage was the end of youth; it removed one from the youth culture and from the dating system (1988:42)," but if marriage ended youth and now Americans are waiting longer than ever before to marry, youthful behavior may be extending further into the lives of American adults.

The lack of research on adult dating may be a matter of sampling convenience for past researchers. Students are on campus often, so they are fairly easy subjects to recruit for research projects. It may be that scientists avoid conducting research on such private and personal topics like adult dating and sexual behavior to avoid controversy. It is also a possibility that, historically, dating and courtship behavior among adults has never really been an area that has required extensive research. With such low average ages of first marriage in the past, the idea of examining adults and their dating behavior after the age of 23 years old was irrelevant. Delaying marriage was such a misunderstood concept in the past that some argued that it led to permanent mental damage, "Late marriage (with some couples having to wait until they were twenty-three) led to irreparable psychological trauma," (Whitman 1947:147). Marrying young was the status quo, but now that marrying later has become the latest social trend, research on the topic is scarce. Younger populations' and college students' behavior has repeatedly been subject to extensive examination, but the dating lives of adults has gone relatively untouched.

I do not wish to discredit the data and findings derived from younger populations; moreover I am focused on the individuals that are disengaged from their adolescent and teenage lifestyle structures. Dating, courtship, and sexual behavior are socially learned processes (Gagnon & Simon 1973) and with age, the databanks of learned experiences can expand in multiple directions. With more experiences to gain knowledge and perspective from follows behavioral and attitudinal adjustments. Past research has relied heavily on the qualitative and/or quantitative input of American youth to better understand romantic, sexual, and dating behavior, but now younger populations are essentially newcomers to the sphere of dating and courtship. Psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists have merely breached the shallow surface of a vast ocean of scholarship available on the topic by limiting their research to youth culture.

Moving Away from the School Campus

The emphasis of this study is on the vastly dissimilar experience of adults compared to their younger teenage and early-twenties counterparts. The dating and sexual behavior portrayed in scientific research often depicts an academic environment as its backdrop, most typically a school. In this study, I am removing academia from the equation and plugging in the rest of the land and institutions around it. For example, in terms of studies on gender roles, Barrie Thorne's (1993) research on gendered behavior on the school playground is significantly different from James Woods' (1994) research on gendered and sexual expectations in corporate structures. Although they may share fundamentally similar theoretical backgrounds, the two environments in which the studies are taking place are worlds apart. Thorne and Woods both researched social structural concepts of gender and sexuality that may influence human behavior and thought, but the difference in environment, playground to corporate office, resulted in vastly different data and conclusions. The same idea adheres to this thesis. By conducting research on adults that are far removed from the school grounds, my findings vary greatly from the research of scholars like Florsheim (2003), Stanley (2011), and Bogle (2005) that focused on academic settings.

Bogle (2008), in particular, attempted to study the dating habits of adults. Out of the 76 participants she interviewed, 25 were recent graduates. In the interviews with these alumni, she considers a tendency to revert back to traditional dating scripts after graduation as detailed prior. She states that, "Rather than departing from the bar or party to hook up, as they did in college, generally the man asks the woman for her phone number and subsequently contacts her to arrange a date" (Bogle 2008:131). She describes a respectful, courteous dating attitude among graduated men, quite similar to the men of the last couple decades who court women through dinner dates or "Coke dates". These seemingly transformed men that were fully

immersed within the hook up culture of sexual exploitation and objectification were now the chivalrous 1950's gentlemen described in the Dating era (Bailey 1988). It was as if a man's completion of his college education and physical separation from the school campus set forth an immediate maturation, an adoption of respect towards women, and a shedding of his commitment strife identity.

Another shortcoming of Bogle's post-graduate sample was that they lived near campus. This was convenience sampling technique that suggests that the alumni participants were not necessarily spatially removed from the hook up environment. Bogle herself places a strong emphasis on the physical environment as a significant enabling aspect to hooking up, yet she purports that these individuals who seized to participate in the hook up culture and reverted back to traditional dating scripts actually lived fairly close to campus. College graduates do not shed the hook up culture so easily, possibly more so for those that still live on or near campus after graduation. The college campus may be the pinnacle of the hook up culture, but it is not exclusive to it. Hooking up has flooded over into adulthood and has permeated traditional dating scripts.

Past research on dating has typically been based in transitory, artificial life arenas like the middle school, high school, and the college campus. These types of environments are not exactly characteristic to the domains of adulthood beyond the boundaries of the school campus. I use the term artificial when referring to the school campus or the undergraduate experience because it is a false representation of the mundane adult environment after graduation. From all the literature I have reviewed and databases I have scoured, it may be possible that researchers have stopped examining dating and courtship behavior at the college campus.

In accordance with the life course perspectives approach, formal commitment or marriage was the customary next step in the social lives of maturing individuals after graduation

(Stanley et al. 2010). Now that Americans are pushing further back this customary next step, a muddled period between the completion of school and marriage is left without proper scientific examination and a language to make sense of it. The college experience has become merely a precursor to adult dating for many people; it is a minor glimpse into the norms, taboos, and responsibilities that correspond with contemporary dating and courtship conventions. Prior research has only breached the exterior barrier of this complex structure of dating behavior.

America's Structural Environment Influence on Dating Behavior

Research has shown that the structure of a nation affects the dating and courtship behavior of its inhabitants (Cherlin 2009). Many social scientists have used retrospective, historical analyses to better understand patterns in dating, courting, and marrying behavior. For example, in the last century, we have gone through three fundamentally different eras in forming romantic relationships (Bogle 2008; Bailey 1988). These eras were directly influenced and constructed by the social and political environment of their given time period. At the beginning of the twentieth century, pre-1920s there was the "Calling era." It was time period distinguished by parent-supervised dates that occurred in the privacy of the young woman's home. Parental control was of chief importance during this era. Parents had the authority to dictate which boys were allowed to court their daughter, the location of the date, activities during the date, and the conversation topics between the two young suitors.

Parents strictly monitored the intimate-physical progression within their child's relationships as well (Bailey 1988). This highly private and parental-controlled environment was typical behavior of many or most middle- and upper-class families. Lower-class and working-class families often did not share the luxury of having phones to initiate dates, piano rooms to entertain guests, or a two-parent household to monitor behavior. The idea of going out to a

public place for a date was distinctive to individuals of lower- and working-class families, but soon enough the public date became a part of the dominant dating script in the U.S.

It was not as if the rich kids wanted to be like the poor kids rather there were events and technological developments that helped influence a widespread ripple in social behavior. For example, when the automobile became an affordable staple among American families dating and courtship behavior was revolutionized for all future generations. Another example is the growing presence of women in university settings and labor force. Women left the privacy of their home and entered into the public spheres of the external environment. Parental supervision weakened and private dating practices became out-dated. By the mid-1920s the “Calling Era” was almost completely replaced by what researchers call the “Dating era.” This next period is characterized by youngsters going on dates to public places outside of the home. Dates were staged in public arenas like movie theatres and restaurants where mate selection became increasingly subject to the mercy of the public eye. An individual’s “date-ability” was dependant on their reputation amongst their peers. Date-ability is a term often used by dating articles and publications that refers to an individual’s physical and social desirability and perceived aptitude to sustain a relationship. The “Coke date” was a normative practice among most Americans. Sitting down at a diner and conversing over a bottle of Coca Cola signaled the occurrence of a date.

In a landmark study, Willard Waller (1937) describes the intricacies of date selection amongst college co-eds, he calls it the “rating and dating complex.” In this study he examined how individuals’ reputations were monitored and constructed by their peers in an informal, systematic rating complex. Only the most reputable women dated the most reputable men, sometimes referred to as the Big Men on Campus, BMOCs for short. The BMOCs were members of the most prestigious fraternities on campus and usually had reputations of family wealth,

intelligence, and charm (Waller 1937). A woman's reputation was based on several factors including physical appearance and social circle involvement. In the 1930s, a woman's level of desirability was based on her consumption of a plethora of high-quality dates. Highly-sought-after women went out on dates with many quality men, but never committed to one exclusively. She was the girl at a dance that had the longest line of suitors waiting to dance with her. She rarely left the dance floor because her desirability level was so great among men. Waller uses the term "image building" when describing the tactics youngsters had to use to bolster their reputation. As parental supervision became less and less primarily due to college enrollment reaching record highs, researchers argue that we have entered a new period, the "Hook up era" (Bogle 2008; Armstrong, Hamilton, & England 2010).

The problematic aspect of the "Hook up era" is that the research done on it has been conducted exclusively in academic environments and is often biased to reflect the lives of the white, middle- and middle-upper class. The examination of the college dating environment is not a sufficient enough assessment to deem it as the next era in dating and courtship behavior. I argue that other tangible elements and social trends must be considered other than college enrollment. Technological innovation and the digital age should be considered when consulting what the next era of dating is. Also, economic factors significantly influence dating behavior (Goldman 1910). Bailey argues, "The centrality of money in dating had serious implications for courtship. Not only did money shift control and initiative to men by making them the "hosts," it led contemporaries to see dating as a system of exchange best understood through economic analogies...Dating, like prostitution, made access to women directly dependent on money," (1988:22).

So far the 21st century in the U.S. can be characterized by a gloomy economic recession, the emergence of social media, and major communicative technological developments to name

a few. Consequently, features like these directly affect the lives of Americans, behaviorally, ideologically, and for this particular study, romantically. As we have seen in the past, broader structural elements of society affect dating and marital behavior such as the accessibility of the car. Another example would be the economic stability post World War II and how it led to hasty marriages resulting in the baby boom (Cherlin 2009). These lifestyle elements fundamentally changed how young people dated and who they dated (Bailey 1988). Elements like these can help us understand the way U.S. adults date, court, and commit. Thus far, I have covered social, environmental, and structural elements that shape the way we date, but a research reveals that ideology matters as well.

Ideology's Effect on Dating Behavior

Andrew Cherlin (2009) argues that the dynamics of American romantic relationships are different than other Western industrialized societies. Through a cross-national and cross-cultural analysis, Cherlin illustrates that the U.S. sets itself apart from other nations mainly due to an inherent conflicting ideology of individualism and the belief in lifelong companionship. Reporting from data in the World Values Survey, he found that many nations like Sweden and the Netherlands embrace individualism in their relationships while others like Italy strongly subscribe to companionship. Cherlin argues that the U.S. is the only industrialized Western nation that strongly supports both. He argues that most Americans believe that, "A marriage should be a permanent, loving relationship... Divorce should be a last resort." (2009:27), but at the same time, most Americans agree that, "One's primary obligation is to oneself rather than one's partner and children... People who are personally dissatisfied with marriages and other intimate partnerships are justified in ending them," (2009:31). Cherlin argues that this contradiction in belief systems has caused an enormous amount of turmoil within our romantic

relationships. This is a very high-level evaluation of the amorous relations of Americans, but this finding is significant to be aware of when studying dating behavior at the individual level.

Cherlin supports his argument by providing historical evidence illustrating the clash of these conflicting views embedded within America's religious beliefs and federal legislation. For example, among all Western industrialized nations, we are the only country that allocates federal funds to support the institution of marriage, and as recent as 2006, Congress enacted a law allocating \$150 million per year to projects promoting healthy marriages and responsible fatherhood. On the other hand, we're one of the only countries to have some of the most lenient requirements and procedures for divorce. We provide the tools and incentives to marry as well as the resources and regulations to divorce. Americans firmly believe in marriage as the most viable structure to start a family, yet single-parent households and babies born out of wedlock are extremely common (Cherlin 2009).

Cherlin explains that the U.S. marries more often than any other nation in the world, but it also divorces and reenters new relationships more than any other nation in the world as well. He makes his argument using a retrospective, historical, and cross-national comparative analysis, but does not address how these findings translate into individual-level interactions. This may be to avoid reductionism which applying conclusions that pertain to a group to the individual. Cherlin focuses a great deal on marriage, but overlooks the dating and courting beforehand. Dating, courting, and marriage are vastly different concepts and dynamics. The differences are that dating is informal and does not necessarily lead to marriage, courting is more formal and stable than dating with marriage as the end goal, and finally, marriage is a formal commitment perceived to be lifelong. In this analysis, I attempt to determine whether or not these conflicting ideals of individualism and companionship emerge within relationship

establishment and if this ideological contradiction causes as much turmoil in casual romantic relationships as it does in marriages.

CHAPTER TWO

SAMPLING, METHODS, AND DESIGN

Research Design

In this study, I began with qualitative-inductive research approach. It is not entirely based within grounded theory because I pull ideas and concepts from past research and personal experience. At the beginning of this process, all I had were speculative thoughts embedded within the social and demographic statistics already released (Cohn et. al 2011) as well as the insights and shortcomings discovered in prior literature published on dating. The main critique I have regarding past research, and one of the principal reasons why I began this study, is the overused research sample of youth and student populations. In order to make inferences about the present era's latest dating and courtship conventions, research needs to move away from the transitory, artificial environment of the school campus and go beyond samples that consist of teenagers and young adults in their early twenties.

Qualitative analysis is most appropriate when researching processes like dating behavior and relationship development, especially due to that fact that examining such personal aspects of social life can be extremely complex and convoluted. Qualitative methods are best for examining in-depth, individual-level interactions. While quantitative measures are better suited for assessing trends within large samples or entire populations, qualitative measures are capable of untangling the chaotic intricacies of micro interaction and constructing a story (Warren & Karner 2005; Emerson et. al 1995). Quantitative analyses are useful when reporting descriptive information or correlates such as the average age of first marriage and divorce rates,

but it is impractical to quantitatively measure how individuals approach and go about their dating and courting experiences. Rating how you date on a Likert scale is insufficient; it fails to illustrate a well-rounded picture of complex emotions, conflicts, and attitudes that participants themselves struggle to articulate. An hour-long interview of free-flowing conversation can reveal much more complex data than that of a Likert scale-response on a survey.

Sampling Methods

What makes the study of contemporary dating behavior and courtship convention so complicated is that it is not as transparent as it once was (Bailey 1988). There are always exceptions to rules and there are always different interpretations to any one topic. While some may wholeheartedly agree with men's role in taking the initiative in relationship development, others may staunchly subscribe to a more progressive stance where gender roles are not so concrete. During a date, when assessing who is to assume financial responsibility for the activities the answer, as it often is when interpreting behavior, is "it depends." Answers to questions of this nature are often embedded within an individual's personal lived experiences, biographies, and structural frames of reference. Interview transcription, reading, coding, and then re-reading and further coding will enable common trends and patterns to emerge from different individuals as data (Warren & Karner 2005). No quantitative statistical instrument can measure this type of material as well as qualitative methods can.

Participant Demographics

This research was conducted in the early months of 2013. After approval from the university's IRB, I recruited, coordinated meetings, and interviewed 22 adults between February and March 2013. I used a convenience and snowball sampling method in order to assemble my data sample. I proactively attempted to recruit individuals who differ by age, class, and race as to avoid the white, middle- and upper-class bias that has been a main critique of past research

done on dating behavior (Bogle 2008; Bailey 1988; Waller 1937). By establishing these goals early on, it forced me to be more conscious about the diversity of my participant resulting with a fairly assorted sample.

I was able to recruit a wide-range of participants from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Most of the sample consisted of domestic-born, second generation women and men, but I was able to include the perspectives of two foreign-born participants as well. There was hardly a majority cultural group represented exclusively in my sample, besides maybe if you categorize domestic-born individuals as simply American, and I do not. The women in the study consisted of one Italian-American, one Mexican-American, two Irish-Americans, one self-proclaimed Jewish-American, one Polish-American, two African-Americans, two Filipino-Americans, and two mixed-racial women (one claiming to be a “mutt” considered herself as Caucasian and the other was domestic-born, half Korean, a quarter Dutch, and a quarter German). Previous research has shown that there are racial variations in dating behavior (Stanley, Rhoades, & Fincham 2010; Cherlin 2009), so by having a racially and culturally diverse sample may possibly take race out of the equation.

The men in the study were also fairly diverse. As mentioned prior, I was able to recruit two foreign-born men, one Russian-born man that came to the United States with his family at the age of seven and one Zambia-born man that came to the United States with his mother at the age of ten. The domestic-born men consisted of one Mexican-American, one Italian-American, one Irish-American, one self-proclaimed Jewish-American, one German-American, and two self-proclaimed Caucasians. Although these men and women had different racial and ethnic backgrounds, their narratives were astonishingly similar.

In order to take off where Bailey (1988) and Bogle (2008) ended, I needed to focus all of my attention on the adult population that they overlooked. Besides Bogle’s brief analysis of

college alumni, the dating behavior and attitudes of adults over the age of 23 have been relatively absent in past dating and relationship research. Participants that I recruited had to be at least 23 years old. Participants had to be finished with their undergraduate studies and removed from the college hook up environment at the time of the interview. I targeted participants around the current average ages of first marriage, 26 years old for women and 29 years old for men (Cohn et al. 2011). Dating behavior and attitudes of a group is often a reflection of their peers' dating behavior and attitudes (Bailey 1988).

The youngest participant in my sample was 23 years old at the time of the interview and the oldest was 30. The sample consisted of two 23-year-olds, one 24-year-old, six 25-year-olds, six 26-year-olds, four 27-year-olds, one 29-year-old, and one 30-year-old. The average and median age of the sample are 26 years old. The average age of women in the study is 26 and the average age of men is also 26. An exclusive sample of such ages is one yet to be used in dating research. Besides a common age range, the sample also consisted of commonalities in terms of level of education and employment status.

I recruited a sample consisting of primarily college-educated, working adults. "College-educated" because Bogle's analysis was based on college students, so essentially I'd be picking up right where those participants left off. In her study, she argues that most individuals experience or are directly influenced by the hook up culture on campus regardless if that campus is private or public (Bogle 2008). I also required that participants were "working adults" because Bailey's emphasis on the economy of dating and importance of money in participating in dating convention. By focusing on college-educated working adults, I am presuming that they all experienced the hook up culture in some shape or form.

Most college students engage in a hook up culture on campus (Bogle 2008) that may affect their prospective dating behavior. The participants in this study attended a wide variety

of academic institutions and some have or were in the process of furthering their education past the undergraduate level. I interviewed individuals that had attended private universities, public universities, online universities, community colleges, and some that attended a combination of these. All participants held a bachelor's degrees, but their majors vary across many disciplines. Participants studied in a variety of majors and minors including education, kinesiology, sociology, psychology, chemistry, communications, Spanish, business, history, and more. Three participants were currently in graduate programs pursuing their Master's degrees, one recently completed their Master's program, and one completed their doctorate degree. These individuals described a plethora of dating, hook up, and relationship experiences with me, and I made sure that these experiences were specifically localized after they received their bachelor's degree to not replicate studies of the past.

Past research has also shown that dating is just as much of an economic interaction as it is a romantic interaction (Bailey 1988; Goldman 1910). Research has shown that status and wealth is a common characteristic emphasized by women when assessing mate potential (Zentner & Mitura 2012). Dating is often written and spoken in economic terms. The content Bailey analyzed in her study referred to the perceived "value" of a date, the perceived "abundance" of potential suitors, and a dater's perceived level of "competitiveness." The initial reason why dating occurred outside of the home was because lower-class and working-class families did not have resources like family parlors or piano rooms in their homes to host dates for their children. Once the popular trend among all social classes became dating outside of the home, money became an even more a central feature to participation. You have got to have money to date. At least that was the rule for men. In order to go on a "Coke date," the man had to have the ability to pay for the Coca Colas for himself and his date.

Focusing my attention on not only college-educated adults, but working adults is a fundamental characteristic of this study. At this point in their lives, my participants were fairly financially independent from their parents meaning that the money and time they spent on dating is exclusively their own. The participants in my study held a wide-variety of jobs and came from job sectors all across the board. I interviewed nurses, nannies, teachers, salesmen and sales women, bartenders, entry-level corporate associates, personal trainers, pharmacists, construction project managers, hospital dieticians, and radio employees among others. The list goes on. Many participants held more than one job or were pursuing several career paths at the time of the interviews. This demographic is generally the central group depicted in past literature, but older.

This study is limited to a convenience sampling frame consisting of adults living in and around a large, metropolitan city within the United States Midwest. Some participants still lived with their parents in the suburbs. Others lived on their own or with roommates in the suburbs. Some lived on their own or with roommates in the metropolitan city. Most of my participants rented, but one of them owned a condominium in the city. I interviewed exclusively heterosexual men and heterosexual women. Most of the sample was single, sometimes newly single. Others were just recently “taken,” but for the most part, the participants discussed their dating and hook up experiences while they were single or casual dating.

Sample Recruitment and Conducting Interviews

In order to recruit my sample, I used a wide variety of digital tools and resources available to me. Social networking websites were great in connecting and orchestrating participants in this study. I used social network platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and blog networks to connect with willing participants and schedule interviews. Upon receiving voluntary, initial participants, I then used a referral system, also known as the snowball sampling

technique. I asked participants to refer their friends or relatives in order to expand and round out my sample. For sake of accessibility, I provided the option for participants to interview over video web chat using software like Skype, but I did encourage face-to-face interviews to minimize the chance for technical disturbances and faulty internet connections. All but one participant elected to meet with me face-to-face; the other I video chatted using a tablet and Skype software. We sat down and discussed their dating lives in locations and neighborhoods all over the city and suburbs. We met in coffee shops, bars, living rooms, and cafeterias. The only incentives I could provide my participants were a better understanding of contemporary adult dating and possibly a free beverage.

Interviews were very casual like a discussion, open for improvisation so that participants were able to determine themselves what they feel most strongly about. Interviews were semi-structured using an interview guide. First, I began the interview by going over the participant's basic background information including age, cultural/ethnic background, education history, and occupation. Then, I asked the participant to share their thoughts and experiences about past and current romantic relationships and dating episodes. I found that the basic question, "What is your current relationship status?" set off immediate reactions of uncertainty as I will later elaborate on. The social networking website, Facebook, introduced the term "relationship status" as a way to distinguish the state of an individual's romantic relations (Suddath 2009). The term "relationship status" has become so embedded within this generation's lexicon that there was no confusion over what I was referring to. This language has become normative for Millennials and Generation Y when assessing one another's availability in the dating scheme. Relationship status has become increasingly difficult to determine due to American's reluctance to commit or place a "label" on their relationship (Smiler 2012).

I then had participants walk me through one or a few dates or hook ups in detail; I asked questions like, “Have you dated lately?” In many cases, this question prompted a counter question along the lines of, “Well, what do you consider a date?” I will elaborate further on this pattern later in the results section. Eventually, most participants described a recent date or hook up experience. Scripting theory suggests that our behavior is largely influenced by socially constructed, governed, and agreed upon scripts (Waller 1937). If the participant did not have any recent dating or hook up experiences to share, I then assessed their absence from dating, but wound up discussing a date-like situation. Participants often had experiences that they will not necessarily categorize as a “date,” but merely an interaction between someone that became romantically interested in them or vice versa.

I explored several topics from dating philosophies to gender roles to personal principles of mate selection. Zentner and Mitura (2012) found that intelligence, kindness, and sense of humor were significant characteristics in mate selection most cultures worldwide. In less egalitarian countries, women emphasized wealth and men emphasize beauty. When assessing the participant’s dating philosophy, I was primarily interested in their beliefs and attitudes toward the dating process and dating behavior. Researchers have argued that dating perpetuates gender double standards, the sexual exploitation of women, and the economic exploitation of men (Belk & Coon 1993). Heterosexual relations are often rooted in a variety of gender norms and taboos. Dating, in particular, is a process by which these gender norms and taboos materialize exclusively. In the next section of this study, I will illustrate the types of scripts, norms, and taboos that exist within adult dates and hook ups.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HOOK UP HANGOVER

Contrary to what past research suggests, the hook up culture most associated with college campuses is pervasive in adult lives after college graduation. I call this phenomenon the, “Hook up Hangover.” The laissez-faire, non-committal, sometimes substance-induced, and alcohol-centered aspects of hook up culture has left a lasting impression on those that participated in it back in college. Hook up behavior and attitudes are so influential that they carry over into the dating lives of adults. For example, the following excerpt is from my discussion with Jada, a 30-year-old African-American woman with a Bachelor’s and Master’s degree. She currently works in the health care industry.

She has experienced the negative effects of the hook up hangover first hand. In describing a man she recently dated, age came up as a significant factor in determining his date-ability. I asked that she elaborated on the emphasis she places on age and she wound up describing another man who basically embodies the hook up hangover phenomenon.

PI: Why do you mention that he was young? Would that have mattered?

Jada: Yea like if he was in his early twenties it would’ve mattered.

PI: What is it about guys in their early twenties?

Jada: They tend to be immature.

PI: Give me an example.

Jada: Um let me think. They’re just across the board, I feel like guys across the board just mature slower than women.

PI: Give me an example.

Jada: (laughs) Okay Tony. He was probably a really good example. He was just stuck in his college days. He was just not ready to commit. He wasn't thinking about anything long-term.

PI: What made you think he wasn't ready for a relationship?

Jada: He was just always smoking weed and playing videogames. His dad was still giving him money. I mean he had a really good job that was taking care of most of his bills. At this point we were out of college. Years had passed and then we briefly like hooked back up and tried it again. He just was still in an immature state of mind I guess. He just wasn't ready. Those are things that teenagers do. There were times that he'd rather get high than do things with me or he was too stoned to do anything.

PI: How old were you two at this point?

Jada: I was 25 and he was 25 or 26.

Jada's experience with Tony is not an isolated incident. As a matter of fact, many of the participants expressed their negative experiences with immature women and men comparing them to teenagers stuck in their college days as Jada so eloquently stated. Participants have been aware of their own immaturity or the immaturity in their relationships, yet speak of it as normal and natural for someone in their twenties. These reoccurring narratives have led me to believe that the hook up culture on the college campus does simply not depart from its participants; remnants of its existence continue to hang around in the lives of adults and most notably in their dating behavior.

The hook up culture in college causes quite the hangover as you could see. The physical and mental separation from the college campus leads to withdrawal-like side effects. Some of the side effects include a variation of a reluctance to commit, uncertainty, irresponsibility, immaturity, parental reliance, alcohol dependence, and substance-abuse to name a few. It is as if the college hook up culture has become so engrained in individuals that hook up behavior later into adulthood has become normative. The presence of alcohol and drugs particularly

continues to emerge in the narratives of the dating lives of these adults; hook up escapades and indefinite relationships begin and carry on with alcohol and drug use as a constant. A dating experience without either one seems to be far and few between.

The Presence of Alcohol and Drug Use in Dating

Alcohol and drug use are undoubtedly significant characteristics of the hook up hangover phenomenon. In college, most hook up encounters involved alcohol as providing “liquid courage” to its participants or marijuana to distort the inhibitions of those involved. Even for those that didn’t drink or do drugs, its presence was nearly inescapable. Evidently, this feature is not limited to the college campus; the experiences of participants in this study are living proof. The use of alcohol and drugs is common within the dating experiences and hook up encounters of American adults as well. Interviewees have described the use of alcohol and drugs to settle nerves, facilitate hooking up, and as a catalyst to “being yourself” or putting on your “A-game.” There is even a distinct difference between actions done or things said while sober and actions done or things said while intoxicated. All of which are adopted behavior and attitudes from the college hook up culture. Alcohol and drug use reveals many commonalities between our college selves and adult selves, but there also distinct differences as well.

Alcohol and Drug Use into Adulthood

The hangover from college hook up culture can be both literal and figurative. College alumni in this study have described drinking so much alcohol that they don’t remember their nights, often referred to as a “black out,” and they’ve also described a reliance on alcohol consumption to facilitate their social lives. College hook up culture is so persistent that it has lead to harmful habits like this further into adulthood. Alcohol and drug-use were such common characteristics of campus lifestyle that it was often difficult to detach from. To separate from drinking and drugs meant to separate from the hook up culture. In order to participate in the

hook up culture, students were required to have direct exposure to drinking and drug use (Bogle 2008). The findings of this study suggest that this pattern is reasonably similar for adults in their later twenties. Everyone seems to be either drinking, smoking pot, rolling on ecstasy, abusing prescription drugs, or consuming some combination of a couple of these.

These characteristics of alcohol and drug-use have carried over and helped construct problematic habits among adults. For example, Rochelle, a 26-year-old Jewish-American dietician, has to proactively plan her dates so she does not have downtime beforehand to drink:

Rochelle: We went to this place in Madison Square and it was weird because they kept playing like 1950s beach videos there.

PI: Did he pick you up?

Rochelle: No I met him there. I like specifically met him there after work, so I wouldn't be tempted to like have a sip of alcohol before the date. Do you know what I mean?

PI: Do you usually drink before your dates?

Rochelle: Yes I usually do to settle my nerves because I'm usually so nervous.

PI: You're nervous? What do you get nervous about?

Rochelle: I don't know. That they're not going to like me or I'm going to feel weird or it's going to be horrible or I don't even know, I just get nervous you know?

Rochelle's rationalization is quite common. Many other participants revealed a tendency to rely on alcohol to settle nerves or feel more comfortable when romantically interacting with individuals of the opposite sex. Dating has often been associated with perceived heightened expectations to live up to.

Rochelle's roommate Bridget, a recently graduated, 23-year-old Irish-American that nanny's for a living, describes the nerve-racking expectations that dates can induce. Bridget re-encountered an old crush from high school on "Black Wednesday." They eventually planned

to go on a one-on-one date. The following is an exchange I had with Bridget and Rochelle regarding the old high school crush.

PI: Since you guys hung out that first night until 5am and he comes over to your place to hang with your girlfriends, does it make the first date any less special?

Bridget: No, I think I was more nervous for it.

Rochelle: Right I think it's especially nerve wrecking especially because if the guy liked you the first couple times meeting then you've got to like live up to expectations.

Bridget: Yea that's kind of right.

PI: You don't think you can just be yourself by then?

Bridget: Right. I was really nervous the first time we hung out after Black Wednesday.

The one-on-one date with Bridget's old high school crush brought about heightened, nerve-wracking expectations. While Bridget didn't remedy her nerves with alcohol before the date like her roommate Rochelle, she did end up at a bar to drink and play board games on her first date night with the old high school crush. In order to compensate for those heightened expectations and feelings of nervousness, adults turn to alcohol for "liquid courage" as they once did as college students. Other women have similar experiences with alcohol and dating, but describe them a bit differently.

Jane, a 25-year-old Korean-Caucasian mix works admissions at a nursing home. She reiterates Bridget and Rochelle's sentiment. She describes her tendency to have too many glasses of wine while out on dates, "I get so nervous that I have to drink wine (laughs). On the first date, I have to do that on the first date." Alcohol was relied upon to settle her nerves and self-awareness on dates. Note that Jane, Rochelle, and Bridget were all sober during our conversations. They were all attractive, sociable, and outgoing women. They all seemed more than capable to maintain a conversation, but when it came to date settings these women lost a sense of self-confidence that was remedied with alcohol.

Brad is a 29-year-old Caucasian man. He is a well-built personal trainer, sociable, and has a good sense of humor, yet he could not date without a friend present and alcohol consumed. His first date after hooking up with girl was a double date with a friend and his girlfriend, he says, "It was cool. It was pretty chill, but just ended up drinking right away, so it made it a lot easier. It was easier because two other people were there too. I'm sure if it was just us two I would have been fucked. I'm almost positive of it." I asked him to elaborate further on that and he says, "Ya know, I probably would have just drank my way through dinner just because I'm kind of shy and ya know, it eases the tension a little bit. I get really nervous. I tend to drink myself through it, but then I drink too much and I tend to embarrass myself and it all backfires." I asked if he was afraid of embarrassing himself and he replied, "Yea and probably rejection as well. I'm just not used to it I guess." Dating could make the most sociable and easy going people dependent on alcohol to get through a dinner.

Sober social interactions with the opposite sex, especially when it involves romantic attraction, are such out of the ordinary conditions that participants often turn to alcohol or drugs to manage their discomfort, nervousness, or self-awareness. Some even consider alcohol and drug use to be a mutual interest or something that a couple can have in common. When I asked Molly, a 26-year-old Filipino-American mock up artist, what drew her to a guy that she dated besides his physical attractiveness, she laughed and said, "Well one thing was... So I smoke a lot of weed. We smoked a lot together and when we smoke together we were a different kind of stoned, like we don't get lazy. We kind of get productive like we want to do things." Molly refers to marijuana use as a common hobby and its shared effects as appealing about her last boyfriend. Women are not the only ones that refer to marijuana in this way. Men do too.

Hector, a 25-year-old Mexican-American that works in education was describing to me what set a woman he dated apart from the others, he said, “She was basically like hanging out with a dude. I mean she loved videogames, she didn’t really give a shit what I did, whether it was like smoking weed or wanting to go out and drink, she’d always like be ultra supportive.” The fact that Hector’s ex-girlfriend “didn’t really give a shit” or was “ultra supportive” of him smoking marijuana or going out to drink was what made Hector want to stay together with her. Marijuana and alcohol consumption have become central elements to dating scripts and dealing with alcohol and drug use behavior may be essential to relationship development for some. The dating experiences and attitudes of my participants have also revealed significant symbolic distinctions between being sober and being drunk.

Sober Action vs Drunk Action

Alcohol or drug consumption has the ability to change the way an action or statement is presented and received. The state of mind, either sober or intoxicated, when an individual has sex, says the “L-word,” or makes implications toward long-term commitment is evidently a key indication of whether the individual means it or not. Many of the interviewees discuss the difference between sober actions and drunken actions. Molly had a six-month relationship that had recently ended. She described a time where she thought that the relationship had marriage potential.

PI: So what was the whole point in dating him then? I mean was marriage a thought in your mind?

Molly: I mean, well yes, I feel like at the end of my life I’d want to be married and have a family. Like a good life, but the end goal isn’t my priority. My priority right now is finding the right person that’ll be there.

PI: Did you think he was that potentially?

Molly: No. I mean yea kind of. There were weird times when he was drunk. We got in a fight on the phone once and he was really, really drunk. He’s like, “Why are you being

so mean?" And I was like, "I'm not being mean." And I called him because I wanted to go out and meet him out, but he was too drunk. And so when I finally got a hold of him, he was like, "Can't you live without me for one night?!" And I was like, "That's so mean. You're really mean." And that's when we started fighting and that's when he was like, "We're fine and I'll see you tomorrow and I love you and goodbye." (laughs) And I was like, "What?! Okayyy."

PI: You two used the L-word?

Molly: No! Never. He said that when he was drunk. Like it was a weird thing that made me think about it then, if we were going to be like that what he was thinking. And then there was this other time where I would call him Mr. O'Malley. O'Malley is his last name. And he was really drunk and he would look over at me and say, "Mrs. O'Malley?" And then I was like, "Nooo. No No No." So then I thought about it again, whether or not he was there, but we never talked about it. He doesn't know he ever said that to me. Nobody knows!

Molly's then boyfriend expressed feelings of intense emotional attachment by telling her that he loved her and referred to her by his surname, but since he was really drunk while he said it, Molly wasn't sure that the relationship was "going to be like that that" from then on.

Assumingly, he used the "I love you" statement as an apparatus to diffuse the fight at hand. He also implied that he thought that the two would potentially get married and she would take his surname of O'Malley, but because he was drunk while he said it, the marriage implications were never discussed beyond that night. Now that adults are staying single for longer, the complicated situations associated with alcohol and drug use chronicled in research done on college students have extended into adulthood.

This is another example of the residue leftover from hook up culture. Individuals like Molly and her ex-boyfriend used alcohol to defuse and ignore situations although it may have been the alcohol that further complicated their issues in the first place. Referring to emotional love or implying marriage can be dismissed if done at a certain level of intoxication, but if "I love you" or talking about commitment is done while sober, then it is taken more seriously.

Participants have also expressed a significant difference between "sober sex" and "drunk sex."

In attempting to understand what the meaning of “seeing someone” meant with roommates

Rochelle, Bridget, and Carrie, I stumbled upon a distinction between drunk and sober actions.

PI: So “seeing someone” would mean “having sex with someone or going on dates with someone”?

Rochelle: Um no well I feel like it’d be someone you like definitely text multiple times a week, have sober sex with, hang out with...

Bridget: Well you can be seeing someone that you’ve gone a few dates with...

Carrie: You can be seeing someone, but not really interested in dating them at all.

PI: So you mentioned “sober sex,” what’s the difference between sober sex and drunk sex? Does having sober sex make the difference between just talking and completely single?

Carrie: Ohh man. Yea kinda.

Rochelle: Definitely.

Bridget: Yea definitely.

Carrie: It all changes when you quit drinking though which I have that’s why I say I’m “So single.” Like I don’t even drink or don’t do anything, so like that’s why I was saying I’m “very single.”

Rochelle: And I think that sober sex is definitely different because the person knows he can call you sober while you’re sober. When you’re drunken texting you can overestimate your abilities like girls think they’re more attractive, guys have more confidence, and like you make bad decisions. Like you really just may be somebody’s bad decision, but if you’re both sober and have sober minds, you make the sober decision to have sex. It is. It’s different.

PI: That makes sense, so sober sex is like a sober agreement?

Rochelle: Right it’s like he knows that “I’m knowingly fucking you, I’m knowingly saying these things to you,” you know? Like when you’re both drunk you can just say stupid stuff, ya know?

Carrie: Yea I guess so.

PI: How about you (towards Bridget), what’s the difference between sober sex and drunk sex?

Bridget: What’s the difference?

PI: In terms of relationship status, is having sober sex more closer to being in a relationship?

Bridget: Closer to being in a relationship? Yes. I mean you're sober minded too. I think when you're drunk inhibitions go out the window and It's really hard to explain this, but I think this is what most people feel, like when you're sober I don't want to say it's more meaningful, but it kind of is.

As you could see dating is complicated, and alcohol complicates things even more. The fact that there are such tangible distinctions between sober-minded and drunk actions presumes that alcohol can play a major role in defining a relationship.

Having drunk sex and sober sex can make or break a relationship. The quality of sober sex is an especially significant trait for some men in determining if a woman is worthy to date. For example, Jordan is a 25-year-old Jewish-American that manages his own pub. When I asked him what he liked about the girl he is currently dating, he said:

Jordan: She's sexy as fuck and we have really good sex. The first time we had sex, she was wasted, I was wasted, but the second time we had sex, we were both drunk, but not as drunk. And that's when I noticed it was really good. I noticed how really good it was. I feel like I was obligated to ask her out because I wanted to keep fucking her. And the only way to do that is if you take her on a date. And so if the sex sucked that second time, I don't know if I would have taken her out on date. Sex is a huge part. I would only take girls on dates if I was interested in fucking them, if I felt like they were cool as fuck, and I could hang out with him. I mean she is a cool girl. I wouldn't have asked her out because she's my employee and I probably wouldn't have pursued in trying to fuck her, but because she came on to me. And then the second time it happened it was really good and that's when I was like, "Yo we can't let this affect work or anything."

Jordan makes light of a serious side effect of the hook up culture and increasing normalness of premarital sex (Cohn et al. 2011). Not only does sex make an enormous impact on the decision to date, but the quality of sober sex can make the difference between a hook up and a dating relationship.

Alcohol and drug use can play a wide variety of different roles in adult dating interactions, some good, some bad, some functional, and some symbolic. The key feature I'd like to highlight though is its stark contrast and similarities to the college hook up culture. The

drinking and drug use habits developed at younger ages are really affecting the relationships of adults. These relationships are becoming increasingly unstable, indefinite, and complex, and the habits associated with alcohol and drug use aren't making things any easier. We wonder why marriage is being delayed and rates of marriage have declined to historic lows, but in examining the anecdotes of these adults, you have got to think sometimes, no wonder.

The Concept of Maturity and Those “Stuck in College”

The lasting impressions of the college hook up culture are quite evident in just about every interview I conducted and past research I've examined. The conceptual life stage of “adulthood” has been broken into two parts within the last two decades: emerging adulthood and adulthood (Stanley et al. 2010). Frankly, Americans are taking longer to “grow up.” We are living with our parents longer (Qian 2012), federal health care reform has allowed us to remain on our parent's health insurance until the age of 26, and we are pushing the next stage of marriage and starting a family further and further back. Why these trends have occurred? You could blame the economy, the mass media, neoliberalism, or developmental shortcomings of Millennials and Generation Y, but that's not what this study is aiming to discover. These trends exist and they are affecting the daily lives and personal relationships of twenty-something year old adults of this generation and potentially generations to come.

Interviewees often express their frustrating attempts to establish stable, romantic relationships with members of the opposite sex while others express their reluctance to commit long-term. This is an inherent contradiction of American ideology according to Cherlin (2009). Both men and women have spoken to the immaturity within themselves and others that lead to the bad experiences with dating and relationships. Immaturity often gets confused with individuality. Jada describes her negative experiences with men unwilling to commit prior, as “he was just in an immature state of mind I guess.” While Brandon, a 23-year-old German-

American bartender and account manager, describes his on and off relationship with an ex as “centric focused.” He says, “We’ve been on and off for so long. Her and I are both centric focused on what we want to do for ourselves before that gets tied down. There are a lot of things that I want to accomplish before marriage.” As you could see some refer to the reluctance to commit as immaturity, while others associate it with self-discovery and personal development. More often than not, it is the women referring to men’s immaturity, but you hardly hear men speaking to women’s level of maturation.

In any event, both men and women in the study are reluctant to commit. They seem to drag their feet towards being in a relationship, being an adult, and doing “adult things.” At first, they often speak idealistically to their adult-like behavior, but later on find themselves failing to execute. For example, Tim, a 26-year-old Caucasian that works with children with disabilities, thought that college, hook up-style relationships would have to come to an end after graduation. He started dating an old hook up from college stating, “She wasn’t really interested in a relationship and I don’t think I was either [in college]. I think it was more like we were having fun together, and then when we got out, it was like we’re done with being immature college students. Maybe you’ve got to actually have a relationship, and not just goof around.” He later found out that the transition wasn’t so simple as the following excerpt reveals.

PI: Okay tell me what happened between you two that led up to an actual one-on-one date.

Tim: I don’t know. I think after a little while it was kind of the same kind of thing. Like right after college it was kind of like the same kind of thing as college. Like we would just hang out on the weekends, hooking up whatever, and then it kind of just turned into, “Well this is childish.” She kind of thought that.

PI: She actually said this?

Tim: Just like what we were doing was immature, I don’t know, maybe. It was just like we needed to grow up a little bit and do more couple-y things. And I was okay with it. I

didn't care. So we started. So then it was simple things like ya know going out and getting food together, things like that.

PI: Okay first date, how was that initiated? Who initiated it?

Tim: Umm it was me. It was something easy like, "Let's go out for pizza and beers." And I want to say there was a game on, there was something on. It was kind of like, "Hey do you want to go out and watch this game?"

PI: How was it?

Tim: It was good. It was a lot of, a lot of fun. I was having a good time the whole time. Like I said we were already old friends, so it felt like going out to dinner with one of the guys, ya know, we were just hanging out, having some food, watching a sporting event which is always fun for me. Good times. It was very casual. It was a Sunday afternoon around four or five, she came down [to the city] to get pizza, we hung out for a few hours and that was really it. It wasn't anything very significant.

As you could see, it was Beth calling their interactions immature and childish, but as you'll later discover, Tim's level of maturation had little to do with the circumstances of their relationship. After college, the two continued to engage in the hook up dating scripts previously believed to be exclusive to the college campus. Even though Tim acknowledged himself that he thought graduating meant actually engaging in serious relationship behavior and not goofing around, his very first relationship out of college began as if it were still taking place in college.

The two would meet in the city in social settings (typically bars and parties) with groups of mutual friends, they would be drinking, and inevitably hook up. These anecdotes reveal the same exact patterns described in Bogle's (2008) analysis, except "in the city" has replaced the college campus. What started off as a simple date and starting to do "couple-y" things, a first date between Tim and Beth completely changed the dynamic of their relationship.

PI: How was your relationship with her after that? Did things change?

Tim: Yea I think she was like, that was expected now, those type of behaviors. I kind of felt like the next time we hung out, she was kind of waiting for, "When are we going out again?" Ya know, "When is our next date?" We went out for a good amount of time. We went to movies, we had dinners, we had a couple of nicer dinners like downtown. But after awhile it just of became a pain a little bit.

PI: What do you mean by that?

Tim: Well we weren't living near each other anymore. Our schedules wouldn't be matching up. I was always busy with work and all the other activities that I coach. I guarantee it was probably more me than it was her because it was a normal day for me to get home at 8:45-9 o'clock at night and I'd have to be up at 5am the next day, so ya know weekdays turned into...well like the first times we used to hang out I'd meet her on a weekday, but then it became so difficult, it almost became like a hassle to keep trying to figure this out and keep trying to juggle our two schedules at the same time. She lived in Rockhurst, so we'd meet like half way. She'd meet me in Everdale to go see a movie, go eat dinner, things like that. We would meet sometimes. She would come down here sometimes, ya know? It literally turned into a hassle.

PI: What do you mean it was more me than her? Did you two discuss ending the relationship at some point?

Tim: Not like an exact conversation. I feel like it kind of just faded away. Ya know? From what it seemed like she was interested, I mean I was too, but we both kind of got frustrated with not seeing each other as much. I didn't see her for one week, then the next week we'd both be busy, so now it's like we haven't seen each other for two weeks, now someone else is busy and now we haven't seen each other for three weeks and now she's kind of frustrated, I know I was frustrated, and then it was kind of like, it simmered from there.

PI: Do you guys still keep in touch?

Tim: Yea, I mean it wasn't as much as it was before, but ya know, it's back to the occasional meeting up maybe if she was down here. We don't go out on dates anymore. I mean we're still friends in the sense we still hang out and have mutual friends. So I don't think I was blaming her or she was blaming me or anything. I think it was just both of us understood it was going to take a lot of work to keep trying to force these things together.

For Beth and Tim, it was natural to hook up, but to date, took a lot more effort. The lasting effects of the hook up culture often clash with the realities of adulthood which is a fundamental aspect of the hook up hangover.

The flexibility, lack of responsibility, and lack of commitment associated with hook up style dating is often lost when couples try to take that next step towards being boyfriend and girlfriend. Expectations and standards change. Trying to fit a girlfriend or a boyfriend into the hectic lifestyle of a full-time working adult is not simple. Tim's anecdote reveals again a

disconnection between women's sentiment and men's sentiment. Jada and Beth associate lack of maturity or being stuck in their college days with the men they dated, but as Brandon's and Tim's anecdotes reveal, personal or occupational commitments trump relationship commitment. The amenities of the hook up culture are better suited for working adults that are casually dating, but losing those amenities becomes a hassle when trying to date conventionally. I'll elaborate further on the difference between casual dating and conventional dating in the next chapter.

The existence of the hook up culture was primarily a result of the structural and ideological environment of the college campus that enabled it. For example, the close residential proximity of students to one another, the numerous opportunities to meet and interact with other students, and a variety of consensual social settings to hang out at made the college campus particularly susceptible to hook up style dating. After college, adults have to come to terms with living in different cities or states than their romantic interests. They also have to deal with long commutes and the time-consuming nature of their jobs or occupations. Sustaining a relationship as Tim puts it, takes, "a lot of work to keep trying to force things together." Tim is frustrated and rightfully so, but that doesn't make him immature. These findings further confirm Andrew Smiler's (2012) research on *Challenging Casanova*. Men are not just looking to have as many sexual partners as they can; they actually do like dating and prefer relationships. This research has provided legitimate reasons to why men are reluctant to commit beyond the common misconceptions that they're just "boys being boys" or immature men acting like teenagers.

Hook Up Culture Transforms and Continues

Many relationships like Tim and Beth's seem to simmer and fade away. The hook up culture after college has transformed along with the lives of the adults that inhabited it. As a

result, the structural-ideological clash between life beyond the college campus and a lasting hook up culture yields the hook up hangover. I argue here that dating adults currently exist in a pseudo hook up culture. It has many of the elements of how we used to hook up in college, but now has the backdrop of full and part-time jobs, changed responsibilities, changed living situations, and changed expectations of acting like adults. In just about every anecdote I've listened to and examined, these adults spoke to evolved hook up scripts that are anything but traditional. The hook up hangover is so pervasive and embedded within their behavior that they often skip through the details as if their behavior is ostensibly natural and unconsciously normative. Tim's interview began with the following excerpt. Keep in mind that he graduated in 2009 and has been removed from his large Midwest public university alma mater for over three years now.

Tim: I haven't really dated that much. It's more just like friends that hook up.

PI: So what is your current relationship status?

Tim: Single.

PI: When was the last time you dated?

Tim: I guess it was at the end of college when I moved down here. I mean I wouldn't even call that a full relationship, but it was definitely that we went out a couple times, ya know, had some food, had some, ya know, intercourse.

PI: What do you mean by it wasn't a full relationship?

Tim: Uh god I don't know because it wasn't like we were together all the time, like what you'd think a relationship was like. We didn't see each other on the regular. I feel like we'd only hang out when it was convenient for the both of us, so it wasn't necessarily we went out of our way to hang out with each other.

PI: Would you say you were dating this person?

Tim: Uh I don't know. Whatever your definition is of dating and mine is probably different.

The extensive details of Tim and Beth's relationship as I provided earlier was initially summed up as, "we went out a couple times, ya know, had some food, had some, ya know, intercourse." He spoke of this six month-long interaction with a good friend from college as if it was just another mundane interaction in his life. The expectations of dating in adulthood and the actual experiences are far from a reversion to traditional dating. These findings suggest that the hook up hangover is the new normal for adults in their twenties.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DECLINE IN TRADITIONAL DATING

Debates over what it means to be “dating” and what is considered a “date” surfaced time and time again in my interviews. These are distinct elements to 21st century dating scripts and the hook up hangover. Notice in the last couple of lines provided from Tim’s interview he struggles to define his relationship with Beth. He automatically assumes that my definition of dating is different from his own. The two of us are both college graduates, grew up in similar areas, and are roughly the same age, yet he assumes that our definitions of dating are inherently different. He may be pointing to a disconnection between a researcher’s definition of dating and that of his own or he may be expressing his belief that dating is a concept that varies by the individual. This seemingly minor detail of our exchange reveals a lot about the vague nature of adult dating and its complexity. He says that he wasn’t in a “full relationship” with Beth which presumes that there are different degrees of relationships. This uncertainty and indistinctiveness in describing and defining dating relationships is shared by most participants in this study.

Not only do adults find their relationships difficult to define, but they also struggle to define the actual act of dating. Earlier in this analysis, I described the different eras of dating as historian Beth Bailey (1988) and sociologists Kathleen Bogle (2008) explained it. There was the calling era, the dating era, and then there is the most recent hook up era. Distinguishing characteristics of the calling era and dating era of the past were the transparency of their scripts and the rigid gender roles. During the calling era, dating followed a rigid, parentally-controlled

structure. Boy would call girl's home, he then speaks to her parents (usually the mother), and subsequently requests to court their daughter. Parents would host the dates in the family's piano room, parlor, or den.

During the dating era, there were obvious symbolic markers that signified what were dates and who was dating who. There were things like wearing of each other's class rings, girlfriends wearing their boyfriends' letterman jackets, or a couple sitting down to a "Coke date". These were all clear signs that indicated that a couple was dating, and there was little deliberation about it. Unofficial rankings, listings, and charts would be passed around the student body distinguishing who were the BMOCs and who was going steady with whom. The gendered dating scripts and markers today are not so clear as past researchers have observed on the college campus (Armstrong et al. 2010) and as I have observed here with working adults.

21st Century Dating Scripts

A good example illustrating the indistinctiveness of adult dating flashed across the television as I began to write this section. From the Oscar-winning movie, *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012), lead actress Jennifer Lawrence (playing Tiffany) and actor Bradley Cooper (playing Pat) exemplified the epitome of dating uncertainty. The two sat down at a diner in what was a prearranged interaction. Pat orders a bowl of cereal and the following dialogue emerged as follows (Russell 2012).

Tiffany: Why did you order Raisin Bran?

Pat: Why did you order tea?

Tiffany: Because you ordered Raisin Bran.

Pat: I ordered Raisin Bran because I didn't want any mistaking it for a date.

Tiffany: It can still be a date if you order Raisin Bran.

Pat: It's not a date...

Although this is a Hollywood-produced scripted movie, the debate over what makes a date a date and what differentiates it from a non-date is one I engaged in often with participants. By ordering cereal, Pat attempted to reduce his interaction with Tiffany from a date to a casual hang out as friends because he didn't want to betray his ex-wife. The idea that a distinguishing marker like the type of food or beverage ordered during an interaction may separate a date from a non-date sounds silly, but it really is not that far off from reality. Although no participants spoke to ordering cereal to make sure an interaction was not a date, there were many other situations like it.

In this chapter, I will attempt to make sense of the experiences daters have illustrated for me. I hope to bring a bit of clarity to the indistinct nature of 21st century dating scripts by breaking down and sorting out the anecdotes provided by participants. A clear-cut take away from this typology is that none suggest a reversion to traditional dating. I have conceptualized three different types of dating scripts that exist today: wildcat dating, conventional dating, and casual dating. This typology reveals that each script has its own distinct markers that exist among a plethora of similarities. In this analysis, I use the process by which the formation of a dating interaction emerges as to what makes each type of 21st century script different from one another. You will come to see that the revert to traditional dating after college does not exist although bits of the calling era and dating era do persist. Elements of the hook up hangover are the most palpable.

Wildcat dating

It was astonishing how difficult it was for participants to determine whether or not they were on an actual date. Some participants spoke of unwritten rules they thought were markers and non-markers of a date. Evidently, dates could materialize at any time given the right circumstances. I refer to this enigma of a spontaneous romantic interaction as a "wildcat date."

I use the term, wildcat date, in connection to the spontaneous labor strikes of the 1930s. Strikes would seemingly erupt out of nowhere without prior approval or deliberation by a union. They sometimes would materialize out of sheer repressed emotion. These protests were known as wildcat strikes (Fantasia 1989). Wildcat dates are not prearranged and they can emerge whenever and wherever. On one hand, a dater may go into an interaction presuming it is a date, but due to their uncertainty and lack of a prearranged agreement, they attempt to upgrade or confirm that the interaction is indeed a date. On the other hand, two seemingly innocent bystanders can somehow come together and their interaction and mutual attraction turns into a date.

I'll now revisit Jane, our 25-year-old Korean-American mix that works admissions at a nursing home. The next excerpt illustrates a time where she unknowingly went on a date on New Year's Eve.

PI: Have you dated anybody lately?

Jane: Um no not really. I mean I went on a date about three weeks ago. I went with this guy named Peter. He's one of my best friend's boyfriend's roommates, so my best friend Natalya, her boyfriend Brian lives with this guy Peter. We went out a couple of times, went out to dinners together, a group of us. And then it was us four for New Year's Eve and on New Year's Eve we went to see this concert and have dinner, it was like our first grown up New Year's.

PI: You four? Was this a double date?

Jane: Yea it was a double date. At first, I thought it was kind of weird that it was a double date, and I think I was trying to convince myself that it wasn't a date. We went out to dinner for sushi and he paid for everything, and then I was like, "Well okay this was kind of a date."

PI: Because he paid, did that confirm it was a date?

Jane: Because if we were like supposed to be a group hanging out, I would've assumed we would kind of pay for ourselves or like that I would pay for myself and everything, and I was like giving him my card and he like switched the cards ... it was pretty smooth, he like switched the cards when I wasn't looking so that he could pay. I only realized it

at the very last second because we had two different credit cards and I was like, "Wait..."

PI: So you weren't really thinking this was a date going into it?

Jane: Right, well I knew that it was going to be like my friend with her boyfriend and then his like roommate and I was thinking this was probably going to be one, and it was New Year's Eve so we were all dressed up and everything. And then at dinner I was like, "This is kind of like a double date." And then at the concert, since it was New Year's Eve and all, ya know, you've got to get the midnight kiss, he kind of was like dancing with me and expecting a New Year's kiss.

Going out in groups is an adopted feature of the college hook up culture that has become quite normative in 21st century dating scripts. Going out in groups can facilitate the emergence of a wildcat date, but not always. According to Jane, four individuals, two men and two women, two of which are already an established couple, and the other two being heterosexual singles of the opposite sex, going out to a restaurant for dinner on New Year's Eve, is not *always* considered to be a date. Just like the example of Pat and Tiffany's "non-date" over Raisin Bran and tea, Peter and Jane were at odds over whether or not what they were doing was a date.

There were no prior indicators that would have signaled that it was a double date before the foursome went out, yet Peter seemed to think it was one. Unless, he just thought that it was old-fashioned chivalry to pay for the only other heterosexual woman at the table that happens to be single, but of course I can't make that judgment without asking him. Jane had a hunch that it may be one, but went into the night assuming she was going to pay her own way which is a traditional indicator of a non-date. There are things that participants have acknowledged are markers of non-dates, and then there are things that are markers of dates. Jane went on to explain that this interaction was not established as a date beforehand. This changed when Peter switched the credit cards to pay Jane's tab.

PI: Sorry let's finish dinner. How'd you respond to him paying for you?

Jane: Well it was New Year's and I was all dressed up, so I was like okay with it.

PI: Were you excited at all? I mean he kind of changed the dynamic of the night to a date setting.

Jane: Yea I was. I mean he was kind of cute. He was nice and everything. I mean I went into it expecting that I was going to fully pay for everything and everything I ordered I looked at the price and I knew I was going to pay for it, but when he did that, I thought it was really nice.

PI: Was there any indication that this was going to be a date beforehand?

Jane: No not really. We went to their house to pregame to have a couple of drinks, but they weren't anything like that. I don't know that... I mean we weren't initially going to go to dinner, it was just the concert, but I mean we got hungry, so it was like, "Let's go get dinner to eat before the show." It was like a last minute decision. If it was just like any normal night like any old Saturday and they were like, "Hey let's go to dinner." Then I would've known for sure that this was a date, but since it was New Year's Eve and stuff. I mean we hung out a couple of times in group settings and there wasn't anything really like romantic.

In this excerpt, Jane begins to distinguish what made this night a date rather than what didn't make the night a date. Although, Jane and Peter were the only two heterosexual singles in the group that night, it was not believed to be a date beforehand. She then suggests that the special occasion atmosphere of New Year's Eve and being "all dressed up" facilitated the idea that Peter may be presuming that they were on a date without prior agreement.

Others supported this sentiment that clothing and dress can help distinguish a date from a non-date. Jada, for example, said of a man she dated, "I literally told him to never come see me looking like he just picked clothes out the hamper. One day, he looked like he picked his clothes out the hamper and didn't try to iron it. I was like, 'Why do you look like that?'" Going on a date requires a certain level of hygienic upkeep and dress in order to increase the chances that the interaction is counted as a date. Additionally, Jane found Peter reasonably attractive and kind. These characteristics made it easier for Jane to accept the fact that she was blindsided by a spur-of-the-moment date. Peter was also her friend's boyfriend's roommate, so being a

mutual acquaintance made the wildcat date more acceptable. The most significant indicator was that Peter paid Jane's dinner bill. When a man pays for a woman, it is a sign that they are on a date. This is a type of traditional gendered behavior that became most prevalent during the dating era (Bailey 1988).

Jada found herself part of a wildcat date when she met a man named Trey at a club during a friend's birthday celebration. Trey was Jada's friend's cousin as well as fraternity brothers with Jada's friends from college. She says, "He just kept on buying me drinks like whenever I was finished I would come back for another drink." When I asked if the two exchanged numbers, she told me, "Ummm he got my number the next day when we got breakfast." Trey was able to spontaneously develop a mutual attraction with Jada that night, subsequently hook up, and go on a date over breakfast in the morning with her. He was able to do this by primarily paying for her drinks all night amongst other things. Men's ability to initiate and sustain dates by paying for the date's activities is a traditional element of the dating era script (Bailey 1988), yet these interactions hardly resemble a traditional script. Past researchers have argued that dating financially exploits men while women pay their share with sexual compensation (Belk & Coon 1993). Men still take much of the financial responsibility on dates, but the idea that a man can initiate or upgrade a non-date interaction into a date at any time is relatively new.

A wildcat date can emerge between any two unsuspecting suitors, but more frequently between mutual acquaintances, friends of friends, or work colleagues. In a situation described by Molly, she too was blindsided by a wildcat date. Molly randomly reconnected with a mutual acquaintance she met through a friend at a work event that took place at a museum. That night she was "fancied up and everything" and she was introduced to this mutual acquaintance. She

thought he was “the hottest guy I’ve ever met,” but he was rumored to be already in a committed relationship.

Molly: So nothing happened there when we met, but later things happened when he stopped dating that other girl.

PI: What do you mean by “things happened?”

Molly: We just hooked up (laughs) like I just saw him out. His best friend, the guy I work with, I went home with him after work because we were going to go out that night, so when we were at the apartment, we were drinking, he was there because they are roommates. They live together. So he was already there and I got there with my friend. And then my friend passed out, so me and him went to our other friend’s party and then we ditched that and then went home and hooked up.

A night that began as a group of friends going out turned into an exclusive wildcat date for Molly. Her night had all the elements of a spontaneous wildcat date turned hook up: the two met while they were “all fancied up,” the night was a special work event at a museum, and the guy she met was reasonably attractive. Sure, you could argue that this wasn’t a date, but that’s in the traditional sense and what I’ve discussed throughout this study thus far is that dating in the 21st century is far from traditional.

The concept of a date, the act of dating, and the markers that distinguish a date has evolved from being quite concrete to being more abstract. There are things that could suggest an interaction is a date, but not necessarily make it a date. Dating no longer has to be a one-on-one interaction as in Jane’s situation. A date can occur over breakfast after a night of drinking and hooking up as in Jada’s situation. Lastly, a date no longer has to be out to traditional public arenas as in Molly’s situation. The characteristics of a date are vague and are often debatable in contemporary scripts. The difficult to define is a definitive element of hook up culture and the hook up hangover, but what makes the wildcat date distinct is its spontaneous character. Traditional dating was far from spontaneous, at least according to the past documented research on dating in the past (Bailey 1988). Twenty-first century dating scripts for adults

involve both remnants of past traditional dating scripts and the hangover from a hook up culture. As I scoured through pages and pages of transcribed data, I found it difficult to come up with examples of a traditional date. Truthfully, they might not exist anymore. All dating interactions either began as drunken hook ups, were spontaneous wildcat dates, or evolved from long drawn out friendships between heterosexual persons of the opposite sex; all of which are not to be considered parts of traditional scripts of past eras.

Conventional Dating

I pulled the most traditional dating script I could find within the data, the type of dating Bogle (2008) argued that we reverted back to and the idealistic portrayals that the alumni in her sample spoke to. Returning to Bogle's idea of a traditional date, she describes them as, "Rather than departing from the bar or party to hook up, as they did in college, generally the man asks the woman for her phone number and subsequently contacts her to arrange a date," (2008:131). The key elements that I take away from this basic framework of a traditional date are that there is no initial hook up prior to the first date, man asks woman for her phone number, and finally, contacts her to arrange a date. I will breakdown these three key elements using the dates that I found to nearly follow this framework. From all of the narratives I've listened to, I found only three instances that resembled this script among the dozens of dates described to me. Traditional scripts were not only rare, but they were the outliers. As listed prior, there are plenty of traditional elements from the calling era and dating era that persist today, but rarely do scripts encompass primarily traditional elements. I refer to these three depictions as "conventional dating."

Conventional dates attempt to follow traditional scripts, but the hook up hangover and hook up culture tend to steer its participants away from those scripts. Some conventional daters try to actively resist the normative behavior constructed from college hook up culture,

but found the hangover inevitable. For example, Hannah, a 25-year-old Polish-American with a PhD in pharmaceuticals, was courted by a co-worker.

Hannah: Um let's see. There was this one guy that that I used to work with, he picked me up and we went out to dinner. Conversation went really well, we had a lot in common, and family wise were both like really close to our family.

PI: So how'd the date get initiated?

Hannah: Well we both worked retail and we'd always run into each other. Like in the break room or the offices, so that's how we'd get to know each other and how we got to talking. And then I transferred to a different store and went up the ladder and that kind of ended that.

PI: How'd the date get initiated?

Hannah: Oh right sorry. We started talking through text and then we actually ran into each other outside of work.

PI: How'd you two exchange numbers?

Hannah: Well we actually ran into each other outside of work first. We were talking out at the bar, and then a few days later he was like, "Oh didn't I see you at this same bar. I thought I saw you at the bar we were at. I wanted to like call you or text you to like let you know like, "Hey is that you? But I didn't have your number." So that's how it started.

PI: Did you think that was true?

Hannah: No probably not.

Here is an example of the traditional first step of a conventional dating script, but as you could see, it has been diluted with 21st century dating attitudes and behavior. The effects of the hook up hangover persist in the most traditional scripts as well and this example is a testament to it. Hannah's suitor, Adam, used the bar setting (where the two presumably drank alcohol) as a facilitator to get her phone number. The two worked together on a weekly or daily basis, yet the social setting of a bar and the presence of alcohol made it possible for Adam to broach dating grounds, albeit indirectly. This suggests that initiating a date requires a neutral, non-work setting.

Adam felt the need to embellish a story to explain why he was asking Hannah for her number as if outright asking her for it wasn't the ideal option. Participants often use this type of misdirection in their dating scripts. Just like Jane's New Year's Eve wildcat date, the two never discussed being one another's date. Peter had to trick her into letting him pay her tab by swapping their credit cards when she wasn't looking in order to increase his chances of the interaction developing into a date. Indirect and indistinct are reoccurring concepts throughout 21st century dating scripts; being up front and honest with attraction or intentions are yet another unwritten prohibitive rule that is apparent today. Nevertheless, Adam was able to get Hannah's number without hooking up with her, the first step in the conventional date.

Next, the traditional dating script says that after exchanging phone numbers the man "subsequently contacts her to arrange a date," (Bogle 2008:131). In the 21st century, this next step is evidently more convoluted than the first. Hannah describes the time between giving Adam her number and going on a first date in this next excerpt. Similar to many other's sentiments, this time between is crucial for the couple. Many things could happen to deter the further development of a first date. The potential relationship between Hannah and Adam has just established a foundation, but there are many loose screws and bolts that could bring the potential relationship down at any moment. Subsequent phone contact is vital.

PI: Did you have a problem with giving him your number?

Hannah: No not at all. We were just acquaintances I would say. So we started talking more and more through text and talking. Then we got to that point where we would take our breaks or lunches together.

PI: What do you mean by "got to that point?"

Hannah: I feel like once you exchange numbers and you start to text, it kind of goes up the hierarchy of communication.

PI: So is texting the bottom of that hierarchy?

Hannah: I think Facebook is the bottom line. I don't think people email each other anymore do they?

PI: Okay so you've gotten to that point where you elevated from text to phone? Big step?

Hannah: For me it is because I'm not much of a phone talker.

The idea that communicating via Facebook chat or Facebook messenger is the bottom of a dating "hierarchy of communication" is not at all traditional and further validates that a revert to traditional dating is not practical. This dating hierarchy of communication that can exist today has been described by others as well, but not as fluently as Hannah put it. Regardless, 21st century dating scripts can include a progressive structure of different communicative medium stages that daters abide by in some cases enabled by the available resources of the digital age.

From coding all the data associated with communication, I've come up with the following pyramid scheme to dating mediums of communication. The bottom as Hannah puts it is Facebook messaging, or internet chatting; one level higher, is texting; and then there's talking on the phone. The couple must be able to sustain satisfactory conversation at every level in order to proceed to the next. Starkingston, a 27-year-old African American woman that works in the health care benefits industry, describes how fundamental it was for guys to be able to hold a conversation over the phone. She says of a man she dated, "I'm not really a phone person, but the fact that we were able to engage in a conversation for about an hour and ten minutes every day and never get bored, it was okay," she continued on, "It didn't make me like him any more or less, but I thought he was something." Being able to hold conversations over the phone for an extended period of time will not necessarily make a woman like a man any more or less, but it is a basic "something" for a man to have. Men have reiterated this claim as well.

Emilio, a 26-year-old Italian-American man that does marketing for a local radio station, felt that it was a moral obligation to begin phone conversations with the woman he was dating. He says, "That's a big step I guess. To talk on the phone and holding a conversation for at least 20 minutes (laughs)... It's the right thing to do. Trust me, if I didn't have to call her then I wouldn't. I'd be totally content just texting. I hate talking on the phone." Some take an extra step by video chatting or picture messaging which all takes place before consistent face-to-face interaction. These narratives reveal a basic communicative framework that some daters live by although there are always exceptions.

For those following a more traditional dating script like Hannah's, completing these stages was more vital than that of the hook up script used by Tim. As you remember, Tim hooked up and partied with Beth for years in college before their first date. Passing through the communication hierarchy wasn't as important due to their past history and established friendship. Hannah, on the other hand, along with others that follow the conventional dating script tend to have a limited history and prior friendship with their suitors. Many conventional dating participants have expressed the importance of the first phone call. Most use text messaging or internet messengers in the early stages of dating as training wheels; these forms of communication are convenient, done at their leisure, and the messages could be meticulously constructed. Saying the right thing through a text message is much easier with an extended window of time before a response is needed unlike phone or face-to-face conversation. The fact that a communication hierarchy exists negates the idea of a revert back to traditional dating.

At this stage in Hannah and Adam's relationship, she feels that they "got to that point" where a personal level of comfort, attraction, and trust has been established with one another. As Stephanie, our 28-year-old nurse has put it, when dating she needs to make sure, "I'm not

dating some asshole that's going to screw me over and steal all my money." Hannah continues to communicate via text with Adam and eventually begins taking her work breaks with him, but there's a heightened significance to talking on the phone. As she puts it, "I'm not a much of a phone talker," a sentiment shared by many young adults in the U.S. (Larson 2012). Hannah describes answering the phone, "I kind of gave it a double take ... It was just like a natural progression ya know? One step to the next." These daters see this communication hierarchy as a natural progression as if they are unconsciously going through the motions, but this type of behavior has never been part of traditional dating scripts. Internet messaging, texting, or emailing was never thought of as necessary modes of communication in relationship development prior to a first date, but living in the contemporary digital age, it has become rather normative. It now feels like a "natural progression" to go through the communication hierarchy. Hannah self proclaims, "I'm an old-fashioned girl," but as you could see, the most traditional script that I found is still far from the traditional scripts of the past as to why I refer to it as conventional and not traditional.

She may not subscribe to the hook up script, but she also does not wholly subscribe to traditional scripts. Hannah's perception of an "old-fashioned girl" is rather the rejection of the hook up script and the participation in a pseudo traditional script, a conventional script. It is a script that encompasses no prior hooking up, communication hierarchies, texting for hours, and a puzzling dance of traditional expectations and digital age realities as you will see in this next excerpt. Hannah continues to explain her developing relationship with Adam.

PI: What'd you two talk about?

Hannah: We'd talk about our days and talk about how school was going. It was around the holidays, so we talked about where we were going and what we were doing. It wasn't too long.

PI: You wouldn't stay up for like hours talking on the phone?

Hannah: No not talking, but texting we would.

PI: Okay so how did you two get to go on a date?

Hannah: He just asked if I wanted to go grab dinner and I said, "Okay."

PI: Okay, were you excited at all?

Hannah: Yea I was excited. Of course, it's like any first date. From any girl's perspective, the first date makes you a little bit excited, a little bit nervous, then the whole thoughts of what do I wear?

PI: Did he pick the place?

Hannah: He did pick the place, he came and picked me up, he did NOT walk to the door. I do remember that.

PI: Why do you say that?

Hannah: I don't know. I'm just kind of like an old-fashioned girl. I want you to walk to the door and pick me up.

PI: Was this back at your parent's house?

Hannah: Back then I was at home, but now I live in the city.

PI: What'd that say about him that he wouldn't come to the door?

Hannah: I don't know really... Yea it wasn't a deal breaker, but like I said I'm an old fashioned girl, I want people to like... I don't know what the word is.

PI: You want to be courted?

Hannah: Yea I guess. (laughs)

PI: So what'd he do when he got there?

Hannah: I think he called, "I'm outside."

Hannah's and Adam's individual ideas of appropriate dating behavior clash at this point. A seemingly minute detail like coming to the door was one of Hannah's most memorable moments of the date. Note that the two saw a movie that night, but she could not recall what movie they saw. She later maintains, "I have a horrible memory," but the fact that him not

coming to the door was what stuck out in her mind says a lot about the gendered expectations of daters and especially conventional daters.

Some women in this study have expressed sentiments similar to Hannah's. These women expect some aspects of traditional dating scripts to persist, like traditional gendered behavior and manners from the calling and dating eras. Stephanie went out with a guy that pulled out her chairs, opened her doors, let her order first, and would walk next to her on the side of the street. She says, "Those things are like chivalrous. Ya know? Chivalry is not dead! It exists. And like little things like that, I take notice of personally," and many other women do as well. This is another disconnect between women and men that I have found in this study that is influenced by the hook up hangover. Some men recognize that women like Stephanie and Hannah take notice of "little things like that" and act accordingly, while others recognize that some women do not bode well with chivalrous gendered behavior.

Cassidy, a 27-year-old junior high school teacher, rejects historical ideas of gendered dating manners. She speaks to chivalry and a guy she is currently dating, "I don't really go for that. I'm not that kind of girl. I think he opened doors, maybe. Yea, but the whole chair pulling out thing, no. No. That's not for me. Ya know? I can pull out my own chair. I'm not too typical a girl really. I don't need any that nonsense." With such a wide disparity in what is considered appropriate dating manners among women, men like Adam may find themselves at odds over their own behavior and what is to be expected.

The rest of Hannah and Adam's date continued on in similar fashion following closely to a traditional dating script, but often going off in branches of contemporary hook up style behavior and attitudes. Adam paid for dinner although Hannah offered. After a not very memorable movie Hannah describes the end of the date, "I think he just dropped me off. I don't think he walked me to the door either... No kissing. I was very proper. We didn't do

anything. We just hugged.” The two ended up going on a second date, another dinner and a movie, but their relationship did not develop any further after that.

The traditional gendered dating script of guy gets girl’s number and then contacts her for a subsequent date is evidently much more complex and more importantly, it hardly resembles the traditional script at all. When I asked Hannah what she considered her time with Adam to be, she responded, “Nothing. I wouldn’t go as far as dating. I think maybe talking. Interested in each other?” Hannah is an old-fashioned girl, but uses contemporary concepts like communication hierarchies and refers to her interaction with Adam as “talking.” The traditional dating script is an idealistic 1950s image of what dating ought to be like, but the truth of the matter is that it often conflicts with a generation impacted by the digital age and lasting impacts of college hook up culture. Many values and behaviors that once existed within traditional dating scripts have either manifested into something that vaguely resembles the traditional or has disappeared completely. Wildcat dates were spontaneous and conventional dates were prearranged between two individuals without an extensive prior history. All other interactions I refer to as “casual dating.”

Casual Dating

The casual date is by far the most common specimen illustrated by participants. Casual dating begins very much like the wildcat and conventional date which is an initial attraction in a mutual acquaintance, friend of a friend, or colleague. It differs from the wildcat date because it is prearranged, but it separates itself from the conventional date because it often begins with a prolonged period of hooking up or “talking” and “hanging out” in groups before the first one-on-one date, if that ever happens. The prolonged period beforehand can vary widely. Couple’s like Tim and Beth are a quintessential example of a casual dating couple. As a reminder, these two began a hook up relationship in college and after three years or so after graduation of

continually hooking up and talking on and off, the two attempted to “grow up” and do more “couple-y” things.

You could argue that Tim and Beth’s interaction was more “serious dating” or that they may have already been boyfriend and girlfriend rather than casual dating, but Tim himself had no idea whether or not what they were doing was dating, let alone if he was in a full blown relationship. Even those that are serious, but have yet to establish a “title,” are considered casual. In order to conceptualize casual dating, I must draw the line between casual and serious dating. The title is what seems to be the distinction between a serious dating and casual dating couple. The title usually encompasses an acknowledgement or discussion between the couple in which they establish that they are boyfriend and girlfriend; it can also be referred to as being “official.” Many have referred to this acknowledgement or discussion as “the talk.” The couple either makes an agreement through a discussion or becoming official is acknowledged in front of their peers. For the most part, establishing a title or being official is centrally focused on external proclamation and acknowledgment by the public. The couple is only official or boyfriend/girlfriend if they acknowledge to their peers or the digital public (social network websites) that they are.

For example, Molly ended up becoming official with Mr. O’Malley thus taking her out of the casual dating category. The following shows how the two developed a title.

PI: Were you two officially boyfriend and girlfriend?

Molly: Yea.

PI: When did you two transition from just talking to boyfriend and girlfriend?

Molly: I don’t even know. We started hanging out and then we started seeing each other every other weekend or every weekend for like 2 months straight.

PI: Why only on the weekends? Did he live elsewhere?

Molly: No he lives like 2 miles away, but I saw him every weekend.

PI: Oh so you just didn't hang out during the week?

Molly: Well we would. It got to the point where we would see each other every day and then after a few months of that, everyone was like, "Are you guys official?" And then we were at a party one night and I was like, "Hey Brian! Are we official?" And he was like, "I think so."

PI: Were there ever discussions about it prior?

Molly: No.

Establishing a title or becoming official occurs when there are others there to acknowledge it. If the title is not acknowledged in front of others, then the couple may still be considered to be casually dating. Facebook has added to this dynamic by providing a space on users' profile to determine their "Relationship Status." The responses vary from "Single" to "It's Complicated" to "In a Relationship" to "Engaged" or "Married." The Facebook relationship status has become so prevalent as a distinction between casual dating and officially dating that the term "Facebook official" is a commonly used concept within emerging adults' and adults' lexicon (Suddath 2009). Casual daters are those that have not established a title or have not become Facebook official.

If the date is not a wildcat or conventional, and the couple is not Facebook official, then they are considered to be casual dating. Many casual daters, both women and men, sustain relationships similar to that of Tim and Beth's. They begin as established friendships or long, drawn out hook up relationships. Casual dating can emerge from years of on and off hooking up, a social phenomenon enabled by digital age resources and communication abilities. Tim, Brandon, Carrie, Lupita, Hector, and others I have yet to mention, Chanda and Dave, all have hook up relationships in their "back pockets." Back-pocket, casual dating relationships are quite common and fluctuate between on and off cycles. Arrangements like these are sustained with through the internet and the texting. These relationships can be maintained for months or

years at time. The longest back-pocket casual dating relationship that was described to me occurred over a seven year span. During this lengthy time span individuals would cyclically go off and on from casual dating to serious dating to being nearly nothing and back.

Chanda, for example, is a 28-year-old Zambian native that came to the U.S. as a teenager. Through various Zambian social groups, he met another Zambian native living here in the U.S. named Cecil. The two dated seriously at first, but as many young relationships go, at one point the two had too many disagreements to continue on as an official couple. Over the next seven years Chanda and Cecil would hook up and casual date on and off. They'd date other people, they'd get back together, they'd fight, and then break up again. Chanda describes his relationship with Cecil.

Chanda: I'm single, but I'm sort of seeing someone, but she's in Romania. Studying to be a doctor. (laughs) Stupid I know.

PI: Why do you say that?

Chanda: Because we have this whole back and forth thing, but she's always been someone I've gotten along with like really well. She gets my horrible sense of humor like my borderline mean sense of humor. So we kind of like always end up coming back together like some random way.

Chanda and Cecil are currently casually dating and sustaining their on-cycle through text, phone calls, and video chat software. Chanda actually deactivated his Facebook account, so they are not Facebook official. He does not acknowledge her as his girlfriend, thus he still considers himself as "seeing" Cecil.

As you could see the hook up hangover and digital age realities may affect those that are not domestic-born Americans as well. Moreover, you could see that a reversion to traditional dating in adults does not exist. Traditional dating was rigid and transparent. Contemporary dating is frustratingly complex and indistinct. As mentioned prior the distinguishing characteristic of casual dating is a prolonged period of time of getting to know

one another beforehand. This is done by periods of friendship or hooking up prior to dating.

This extra stage beforehand could last as little as days or weeks to months or years. This stage can be sustained through text, internet messaging, Facebooking, Tweeting, video chatting, or talking on the phone. You could even argue that Hannah's interaction with Adam was a casual date, but like I said, traditional dating scripts were the outliers.

Even for those like Hannah that tried to stay near the traditional script, found it difficult to sustain. Hook up culture has extended beyond the college campus and digital-internet based technologies have transformed the dating lives of adults. Stephanie went on a traditional date in which she did not have a prolonged period of getting to know the guy beforehand and she said, "It was really one of the crazier things I've done if you don't count jumping out of planes, scaling mountains, or climbing glaciers or what not." Stephanie is a thrill-seeking sky diver and mountain climber that refers to going on a date with somebody you barely even know as "one of the crazier things" she has done. The traditional script of getting to know somebody *during* a first date is now seen as one of the crazier things to do or in other words, it is taboo. Carrie told me at one point, "I probably went on a date at some point, but it probably sucked (laughs) because I can't remember it." To reiterate a statement by Jordan, he said, "I would take girls on dates if I was interested in fucking them, if I felt like they were cool as fuck, and I could hang out with them." The traditional script of boy meets girls, gets her phone number, and then contacts her for a subsequent date is, for the most part, obsolete and undesirable.

Dating without getting to know somebody first or hooking up prior, unless it is a spontaneous wildcat date which is an anomaly by itself, has become fairly atypical. Adults have experienced immense uncertainty bargaining between the hook up culture, their perceived post-graduation responsibilities of adulthood, and the traditional conventions of dating scripts. The hook up culture does not disappear completely after graduation as you could see, but its

partial absence is an immense adjustment to be made for college alumni. Traditional dating scripts and behavior are indeed apparent after graduation, but the hook up culture rooted in the college experience has left a lasting significant impression on those immersed within it.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Suggestions for Further Research

Due to lack of time and resources, this study has its fair share of shortcomings and weaknesses. A sentiment described by many participants was the enabling environment of living in or around a large metropolitan city. Many of these participants grew up in smaller towns all across the U.S, but migrated to the metropolitan area where this study took place to live, work, or go to school. Some told me that they do not think they would be casually dating and hooking up as much if they still lived in their hometowns. They talked about the lifestyles of their friends still living in their hometowns as being dull, settled down, or that they were already engaged. This leads me to believe that rural or small town dating among adults may not be as similar to dating in or around a large metropolitan area. Including adult populations that reside in small towns or rural areas may yield different results.

Also, it'd be beneficial to examine the dating behavior and attitudes of those further into adulthood. The oldest participant in this study was 29-years-old, so that leaves hundreds of thousands of single and/or divorced individuals aged 30 and above that were not represented in this study. Since I place such an emphasis on the lingering effects from college hook up culture and the digital age, the experiences of older generations may not be the same as those in my study. Not only should I have included more participants that are older, but I could have recruit more participants in general. I recognize that a convenience sample size of 22 is not exactly methodologically sound for social science qualitative research, but I believe without a doubt

that the interviews examined in this study do have scientific significance and adds to the existing literature on dating behavior.

There were a wide variety of dating situations and circumstances that I was not able to elaborate further on. For example, only two women in my study said that they have tried online dating, but I know websites like OkCupid.com or eHarmony.com have millions of members and subscribers (Huffington 2010). This study also captured a small segment of adults, particularly adults with college educations that live in or near a large metropolitan U.S city in the Midwest. This study was limited to the dating scripts of presumably a single socioeconomic class because my prerequisites to participation were being college-educated and a working professional. Additionally, only a handful of individuals discussed religion as a significant factor in determining their dating habits and attitudes, but past research has shown that religious belief and scripture plays a major role in dating (Bailey 1988; Cherlin 2009; Smiler 2012). Asking more questions about the participants' faith may have lead to more attention to the topic. Finally, I did not include homosexual or bisexual relationships, although I am interested in including these populations for future studies.

Discussion

Quantitative research reveals social trends of a delayed age of first marriage, a divorce rate tapered off at every one in two, and a marriage rate at a historic low (Cohn et al. 2011), but beyond that the qualitative dating research focusing primarily on adult populations is relatively scarce. These social and demographic trends have revealed the broader facts, but what exactly goes on at the individual level was the focus of this thesis. Scholars have barely breached the surface of this topic with proper scientific research methods and the research available to better understand contemporary dating behavior is either outdated or narrowly focuses on

adolescents, teenagers, and young student populations (Bogle 2008; Manning et al. 2006; Stanley et al. 2010).

Marriage has overwhelmingly been the customary life structure for the American adult for centuries and remaining single well into adulthood has been taboo for so many decades. Marriage was mandatory, but now it's culturally optional (Cherlin 2009). Americans are opting for single lifestyles, hooking up, and casually dating rather than formally committing. Broadening the base of dating and relationship research by turning the focus on adults could improve romantic relationships and help the U.S. understand why marriages are failing at such high rates. Cherlin (2009) argues that the overarching contradictory ideological structure of individualism and companionship in the U.S. is one answer, and I argue here that the hook hangover is another.

Hook up culture cultivated on the college campus has broader unintended consequences than that of the directly impacted student population. Bailey actually speculated that this social phenomena may have existed back in the 1980s when she wrote in the "Notes" section of her book saying, "College customs probably influenced the culture-at-large as much as vice versa," (1988; 146). Little did she know that she had stumbled upon the fundamental theme of a study that would be conducted decades later and conceptualized as the hook up hangover. As this research has shown, hook up culture has flooded over into the lives of adults causing potentially long-term and harmful drinking and drug use habits, it has left adults with a dating culture that is vague and conflicting, and finally, the hook up hangover has constructed a gamut of obstacles to relationship development and romantic love. These data and findings make the delaying marriage rates and the every one-in-two divorce rate among adults seem rather understandable. In order to comprehend and possibly remedy the marriage institution, a better understanding of the relationships that lead up to it is crucial.

One strong aspect of this research study is that it has reliability. The questions I asked and the interview guide that I followed are tools that any qualitative researcher can use. Critically thinking about and studying dating, Bailey explains, “is part of our culture’s attempt to answer the basic question of what it means to be a man, to be a woman, and to be a man and a woman together,” (1988:6). Becoming conscious of our actions and attitudes when we perform dating can confront problematic gender ideology and theory as well. There are still articles being published that suggest that human beings behave according to natural, physiological differences between women and men. One’s that argue that men have a *natural* tendency to withdraw from relationships, and that women are *biologically predisposed* to be the pursuers in relationships (Hetherington & Kelly 2003). By thinking critically about how gender exists in dating behavior, men and women can find themselves on the same page of what relationships and marriages ought to be like; not one of an economic agreement or sexual exploitation (Bailey 1988; Goldman 1910), but a partnership in pursuit of happiness and equality.

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VITA

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